Roman Domestic Art and Early Church Houses
David Balch. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
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Reviewed by Nicola Hayward, McGill University

In his recent book, *Roman Domestic Art and Early Church Houses*, David Balch examines the structure of domestic space and the social effects of domestic art such as murals, mosaics, sculptures and portraits that decorated the walls and floors of Roman houses, with particular attention given to those in Pompeii. His innovative study brings together both text and image in an attempt to understand how visual representations, its subjects and themes, might have influenced "orators and symposiasts" (197). His book is accompanied with 84 black and white images and a CD with over 300 full-colour images.

Balch's introduction begins his study by dismissing the notion that early house churches were small with a maximum of 20–40 members, and private. He argues that these houses along with Roman domestic houses should not be divided between 'private' and 'public' space as we do in the modern West. Indeed, it is much more accurate to think of them as "showcases... into which to attract public, social, economic and political life" (3).

Chapter one begins with Balch's continued interest in Pauline communities and how they would have functioned in early church houses. His focus lies the on the domus and insulae whereby the division between rich and poor is not as demarcated as previously thought. According to Balch, both rich and poor lived in large houses where social stratification was of a vertical type: poor in the basement and rich on the top floors. It was not uncommon to find neighbourhoods in Pompeii that contained both shops and luxury houses in the surrounding area. More significantly, contrary to many extant texts of the period, women were owners of domus, were patrons and ran their own businesses (55).

Balch connects chapters two and three by relating themes of *pathos* in Greco-Roman culture, visually represented on the walls of Pompeian houses, with that of Jesus' suffering in Galatians 3.1. Since Paul founded many house churches and also churches in large multi-story buildings, Balch raises questions as to how art might have been related to Christian themes found in Paul's preaching that may have influenced how his audience received his message. Scenes of suffering and death were not only portrayed in the local houses of Pompey but also in the Temple of Isis, and might have provided a "meaningful context for those hearing Paul proclaim the gospel of Christ's passion"(61). Chapter two concentrates primarily on the suffering of Io (Greek) and Isis (Egyptian) as each wanders the earth in search of a lost family member. Chapter three moves to other images of tragic suffering which would

have made Paul's gospel comprehensible, such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia for her country; Laocoon, the priest of Apollo, who was sacrificed to the gods; and the dying Gauls. The chapter closes with a discussion of an image of a man on a cross with the head of an ass crudely carved on a wall found on the Palatine hill.

Chapter four narrows its perspective to one house in Pompeii, the Casa dei Vettii, focusing on the paired *triclinia* n and p. Here, Balch examines six myths each representing Zeus Enthroned as divine power who guarantees order in both the political and domestic spheres. His research shows that there was a great deal of violence depicted on the walls of Roman houses, which may be linked with violence found in Christian texts. This was particularly significant when reading I Clement's account about the death of Peter and Paul where he noticed a reference to the myth of Dircae's suffering, a theme also present in *triclinium* n.

Chapter five's main thesis concentrates on Rev 12:1, 4, where the author was attempting to subvert "Imperial visual presentation of a pregnant woman/ goddess" (139), who in giving birth to a divine child would create cosmic conflict. Furthermore, the cosmic order described by John has pictorial similarities to those frescoes found on the walls of Roman houses. This particular myth, the image of pregnant woman or goddess (Io/Isis) who was threatened by a dragon, was a popular image in Roman houses, houses where early Christians met for worship, as well as being found in the House of Livia, Augustus' wife, in Rome. John, in writing Rev 12, verbally subverts the Imperial image of a pregnant woman.

Chapter six takes the reader on a longer journey, from the first and second centuries CE through to the fourth and fifth centuries CE. His purpose for such a time span is to look at the visual role of Endymion as a representation of death in early Roman houses to Christian catacombs in the later period, where he was in time represented as Jonah. Such a visual move is possible since domestic art, particularly Pompeian' wall painting, supplied the necessary visual effects that were eventually moved underground to decorate the tombs of the dead; that is, scenes of death were already prominent in Roman houses, even in their dining rooms.

Chapter 7 takes on the larger task of organizing some of the themes that decorate 194 triclinia found in Pompeii. Although the visual themes number in the thousands Balch chooses to highlight only a few; portraits, banquet themes, Isis cult, Greek theatre, the Divine will for human obedience and Roman imperial ideology. His main purpose for gathering such a large and rich visual library is to summarize some conclusions by leading scholars on the subject.

Much of scholarship has tended to focus on either the written or the visual record. Balch successfully brings together both visual and textual sources in order to shed light on how the two have mutually aided depictions of differing aspects of political and religious life. Moreover, his work cleverly unites pagan art, such as that of Dircae, with early Christian literature, which meant that early Christian women

could identify with the struggle, not only between men and women, but also between their own faith and imperial rule.

The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament

Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2009.
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Reviewed by Mike Arcieri, Université Acadia

The 'Preface' to *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* states that its *modus operandi* has its source in two texts from the pastorals: 2 Timothy 2:15 (the exhortation to be diligent in deeds and teachings), and 2 Timothy 3:16 (that Scripture is 'inspired'). Köstenberger *et al* maintain that diligent study in all questions relating to the NT—the history of the documents, the literary genre and theological teaching—is imperative for a correct understanding of these books. Thus the authors seek to explore these facets in connection with contemporary scholarship.

The book is divided into five major sections. *Part One* overviews the nature of the NT writings, including questions regarding the canon (the Protestant canon *sans* apocrypha is defended), pseudepigrapha (which is rejected for any NT book), textual criticism, Bible translations, and the issues of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. This last section, succinct in style and apologetic in nature, can be read with profit by anyone who wishes to understand an *evangelical* perspective of these doctrines.

Part Two addresses the Gospels. Chapter three, "Jesus and the Relationship Between the Gospels" contends with questions and issues about the 'quests' concerning the 'historical' Jesus, noncanonical sayings of Jesus, as well as the Synoptic problem. The editors argue that the Gospel portrayal of Jesus is in fact historical and theological, both aspects being historically reliable. This section alone covers over 70 pages and nearly 250 footnotes, which gives the reader a good idea of the amount of research and detail covered.

Part Three introduces the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus of letters. Instead of approaching the letters from a canonical order, they approach Paul from a *chronological* perspective thus beginning with Galatians, and ending with Titus. All of this is done while correlating the letters of Paul with the chronology of Acts. This is an interesting change, since it reveals the authors' contention that the Paul of the letters is identical with the Paul of Acts, all the while anchoring the Pauline letters (when possible) within the panorama of Acts.